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Joseph Glanvill and Some Restoration Climates of Opinions

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Discussing Joseph Glanvill in *The Seventeenth Century Background*, Basil Willey used the phrase 'the "Climate of Opinion"', which he had adapted from a passage in Glanvill's first book, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, to describe how ideas of Reason and Nature could become confused with those of common sense.¹ Glanvill's actual phrase referred to 'the larger Souls, that have travail'd the divers *Climates of Opinions*', and who are 'more cautious in their *resolves*, and more sparing to determine'.² Glanvill certainly included himself among these larger souls, and it is his journey through the different climates of opinions that prevailed in the years of the Restoration that is his most interesting memorial: his work is a meteorological record of the changing fashions of ideas and beliefs, habits of thought and expression, and the conduct of controversies of fact and, if not of law, of doctrine and faith.

The first edition of Glanvill's most often reprinted work appeared in 1666 with the title *A Philosophical Endeavour towards the Defence of the Being of Witches and Apparitions*, just in time for most of the copies to be destroyed in the Great Fire, and was later incorporated into the text of an enlarged edition, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, published in 1681, a year after Glanvill's death.³ However, the final revision of the text did not appear in this edition, but in a collection of essays that Glanvill published in 1676, called *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion*, under the title 'Against Modern Sadducism in the Matter of Witches and Apparitions.'

The word 'Sadducism' was a term used in the seventeenth century to mean the materialistic unbelief supposedly characteristic of the Biblical Sadducees, and their denial of the existence of spirits and of the immortality of the soul.⁴⁾ It was commonly used by the Cambridge Platonists, Henry More among them, to attack those who disagreed with their views on the existence of spirits, angels or 'dæmons' and on the soul's existence before birth.⁵⁾ The origin of the term lies in the New Testament, Acts 23. 8: 'For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.'

The seventeenth century equivalent to the Sadducees in the Bible was the increasingly large number of people who followed Hobbes's materialistic ideas or their own common sense and began to reject the testimony of the witch-hunters. These people, according to Glanvill, were in danger of falling altogether into atheism.⁶⁾ His attempt to combat this danger, rationally and philosophically, according to the principles of the variety of Anglicanism that was called Latitudinarianism, and to those of the Royal Society, occupied most of his life, and he argued the case for the existence of spirits, witches, compacts with the devil and other such beliefs, until he felt able to declare, in the title of his last book, that Sadducism had been triumphantly overthrown.

The brief life of Joseph Glanvill in Anthony à Wood's *Athenae Oxoniensis* is the fullest contemporary account. It is an unflattering one, and not only because Glanvill expressed a wish that his friends had sent him to Cambridge instead, as 'that new philosophy and art of philosophizing were more there than here in Oxon', but because peevishness and prejudice governed many of Wood's opinions. Indeed, it is surprising that he shows Glanvill any sympathy at all. As it is, he comments sardonically on Glanvill's ability to trim his sails to the wind and adapt to the prevailing theological and intellectual fashions. He alleges that Glanvill obtained his valuable livings and ecclesiastical preferments through his wife's family connexions, that after serving 'one of Oliver's

lords' and being 'a zealous person for a common-wealth', he turned about at the Restoration and became a Latitudinarian. Proceeding with his indictment, Wood observes how Glanvill, in spite of his earlier admiration for the great Nonconformist divine, Richard Baxter, proceeded to take holy orders in the Church of England, and to become vicar of Frome Selwood, ousting a Nonconformist. Wood says that Glanvill's intention in taking to literary pursuits was 'to gain himself a name among the virtuosi', and that some of his books were 'new vamp'd' with dedications and titles altered, 'which, whether it was so contrived to make the world believe that he was not lazy, but put out a book a year, I leave to others to judge.' Wood nevertheless praises Glanvill's style, and does not attack him where he is most vulnerable; for his superstition and credulity.⁷⁾ He gives this character of him:

"Glanvill... was a person of more than ordinary parts, of a quick, warm, spruce and gay fancy, and was more lucky, at least in his own judgment, in his first hints and thoughts of things, than in his after-notions, examined and digested by longer and more mature deliberation. He had a very tenacious memory, and was a great master of the English language, expressing himself therein with easy fluency, and in a manly, yet withal a smooth stile."⁸⁾

It was for his style, found by Sir Leslie Stephen in the Dictionary of National Biography to be reminiscent of that of Sir Thomas Browne, and for his abilities in polemic and controversy that Glanvill was chiefly valued in his lifetime, and it is for his style, and the alterations in it that occurred between successive versions of his books, that reading him is valuable today.⁹⁾ As Basil Willey observed, he was not an original thinker, but his style and the content of his books form a barometer to measure the changing climates of opinions of the time.¹⁰⁾

Joseph Glanvill was born in Plymouth in 1636, went up to Exeter College in Oxford in 1652, graduated as a B.A. in 1655, and took his M.A. at Lincoln College in 1658. He served the Cromwellian Provost of Eton as a chaplain, and returned to Oxford in 1659 when the Provost

died. Glanvill's visit to Kidderminster to hear Richard Baxter preaching filled him with such enthusiasm that he wrote a 'large courting letter' to him in September 1661, introducing himself as an admirer, at a time when Baxter was severely out of official favour. This began what was to be a long correspondence.¹¹⁾ With this letter he sent a copy of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, his first book, in which he argued for a Cartesian scepticism as an antidote to the Aristotelianism of the universities, and showed his admiration for those writers who, in his estimation, showed an enquiring, experimental and mystical approach to philosophy: Henry More, Francis Bacon, Sir Kenelm Digby, Sir Thomas Browne, John Wilkins, Petrus Gassendi and René Descartes himself.¹²⁾

Although he had been 'severely disciplin'd in religion, logic and philosophy' under his tutor Samuel Conant at Exeter College, Glanvill was not restricted in his studies at Oxford to the scholastic curriculum, and may well have known about the work that was being done elsewhere in Oxford to develop a 'New Philosophy', based on experiment and observation, instead of the Aristotelian philosophy taught in the universities. Glanvill became a supporter of the Royal Society that developed from Robert Boyle's 'Invisible College', knew Boyle and John Wilkins, and was elected to a Fellowship of the Royal Society in 1664.¹³⁾

This was largely the result of his publication of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), a defence of the Royal Society against accusations of atheism and materialism. Whether or not Wood's cynicism about Glanvill's motives for going into print is justified, Glanvill's writing obtained him the friendship of some of the most powerful and original thinkers of the time, while his adroit about-turn at the Restoration obtained him a series of livings: he exchanged the rectory of Frome Selwood for that of Street and Walton, and in 1668 became rector of the great Abbey Church at Bath. In 1672 he became Chaplain in Ordinary to Charles II, and in 1678 obtained a prebendal stall at Worcester.¹⁴⁾ Although his preferments meant that he was absent from London and

Oxford and away from the centre of experimental activity, the Royal Society, they gave him leisure to write voluminously, and to adopt the manner of a provincial 'virtuoso', studying local phenomena and writing to the Royal Society to report on his findings.¹⁵⁾ He corresponded with Henry Oldenburg, the Secretary of the Royal Society, and sent information about such matters as the Mendip mines and the Roman baths at Bath, asking repeatedly for lists of questions from Robert Boyle to help him to organize his studies, 'he not judging himself to be Philosophical enough to devise matter of his owne'.¹⁶⁾ He felt himself at times to be somewhat isolated from the work being done in London, complaining in another letter to Oldenburg that 'I doubt I shall bee able to doe nothing hereabouts' as 'Our Gentry are of a temper very different from ye Genius of ye Society'.¹⁷⁾ The experiments of the Society were frequently ridiculed by contemporary satirists—Sidrophel in Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* and Thomas Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* are two lampoons of the natural philosophers—and Glanvill would have received little encouragement from his neighbours. However, it was the scepticism of these gentry in matters of witches and spirits that prompted him, in a letter to a neighbouring Justice of the Peace and active witchfinder, Robert Hunt, to write his philosophical investigations into the existence of witches and apparitions.¹⁸⁾

Indeed, the first investigation he made, and systematically reported, was not into any question of the depth and formation of mines, or the temperature and properties of saline springs, but into what was to become the most celebrated of all the reports of psychical phenomena in seventeenth century England: the supposed haunting by a drumming spirit of the house of one Mr Mompesson at Tedworth in Wiltshire. The case was widely reported and discussed: ballads were written, Hobbes's supporters came to investigate, and those writers who had for years been arguing for the existence of spirits against the materialism of their opponents felt that they had been presented with a palpable case that could

be subjected to the same kind of rigorous examination as the Royal Society might give to an anatomical specimen or the effects of an air-pump.¹⁹⁾ Boyle, Baxter and More were all fascinated by the affair: Boyle had made personal enquiries into the case of the Devil of Mascon, and thought that "one circumstantial narrative fully verified" was all that was necessary to confound the sceptics'; Baxter collected ghost stories, eventually publishing his *Certainties of the World of Spirits* in 1691; and Henry More, who had already brought out one collection of stories of spirits to confound the sceptics, his *Antidote against Atheisme* of 1653, was to work with Glanvill and the members of the Ragley Circle, forming the first association for psychical research.²⁰⁾

Glanvill corresponded with both More and Baxter about the haunting, and several of his letters survive or have been recorded in the reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.²¹⁾

The story, as Glanvill later told it in 'Palpable Evidence of Spirits and Witchcraft: In an Account of the Fam'd Disturbance by the Drummer, In the House of M. Mompesson' (an addition to the 1668 edition of *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, bearing the running title 'The Daemon of Tedworth') was that Mompesson, a Commissioning-Officer in the Militia, was troubled by a vagrant drummer who, on investigation, was discovered to have a forged pass. His drum was confiscated and left with the bailiff, and the drummer, after he had been detained for a while by the constable, was released. Later that year, the bailiff sent the drum to Mompesson's house, and the following night, Mrs Mompesson was frightened by a knocking that seemed to come from nowhere: Mompesson went round the house 'with a brace of Pistols in his hands', could find nothing, and retired to bed. He and his wife were disturbed on the following nights by the same knocking sounds, and the noise of a drum being beaten, 'what they call ROUNDHEADS and CUCKOLDS —the TATTOO, and several other Points of Warre, and that as dextrously as any Drummer'.²²⁾ The children were disturbed in their beds,

objects thrown violently about the bedchamber, the chairs walked about by themselves, 'the Childrens Shooes were thrown over their heads', and the Minister was struck lightly on the leg by a bed-staff. The noises and disturbances began in April 1661 and lasted until March 1663, intermittently, leaving off for a while when Mrs Mompesson was having a baby. In the meantime, a large number of gentlemen came to investigate, causing Mompesson more trouble than the drumming-spirit itself. The drummer himself, the cause of all the trouble, was tried at Salisbury Assizes, 'condemn'd to the *Islands*, and was accordingly sent away: but I know not how, made a shift to come back again.' Glanvill ingenuously tells us that all the time the drummer was away, the noises stopped, and began again once he had returned.²⁹ Gradually even Glanvill himself, who had visited the house and been most impressed by what he considered to be matters of fact and palpable manifestations of witchcraft, began to suspect that Mompesson's modesty about having the story broadcast might have been due to something other than diffidence, although he never doubted the possibility that it might be true. His letter to Baxter, reporting his visit, is worth quoting in full, as an example of Glanvill's epistolary style and orthography, as well as for the picture it gives of his methods of enquiry. It is dated 21 January 1662/3.

Reverend and Honoured

Sr,

I came yesterday from Mr Mompesson's house at Tedworth, of whose disturbance I presume yu have heard. And I understood there, that yu were desirous of a perticular acct that you might publish the Relation. I came thither upon the same designe, & was an eye & ear witness of many things which the Infidell world will scarce believe. I find the Gentleman is not willing to have a Narrative publish't, till the disturbance bee over, & then it will be fully and perticularly done. I'me confident a Relation of those strange transactions will bee as palpable & convictive a Testimony against Atheism as this age hath afforded. Some Hobbists who have been there, are already convinced, and those that are not so are fain to stick to their opinions against the evidence of their senses. My occasions will not give me leave at present to inform yu of perticulars.

If yu desire it, when I have time I shall indeavour yo^r satisfaction. Had I had time to have waited upon yu again when I was at London I would have desired yo^r thoughtes of Præ existence. If yo^r occasions will permitt, I shall make bold to second the request of my former unanswered Letter about it. If you send by Thursday's post & direct to me at Bath, yo^r Letter will reach the handes of Sir,

yo^r ever affect. Serv^t

Jos. Glanvill.

[Dr. Williams's Library: Baxter-Glanvill corr. 5.177]²⁴⁾

The tone of the excitement of the chase, and the number of questions left unanswered, prove Glanvill's own judgment of himself, that he was not 'Philosophicall enough' to make a systematic list of questions to be asked and enquiries to be pursued. Unlike the careful instructions Sir Thomas Browne gave to his son Edward on setting off for a continental tour, which permitted him to report accurately on what he saw to the Royal Society, Glanvill's brief seems to have been unclear, even to him: Baxter and More wanted him to see the palpable evidence of spirits, and, anxious to please, as the tone of the letter to Baxter suggests, he saw, heard and published, and 'the Infidell world' expressed its doubts.²⁵⁾

Wood's observant paragraph on Glanvill's character and style, quoted above, shows that it was Glanvill's character and style, as much as his quality of mind, that attracted men of the intellectual stature of Baxter, Boyle and More. They were willing to be patient with his 'first hints and thoughts of things' in the hope of seeing them developed into works of more permanent value, that would support their own investigations.²⁶⁾

Despite their theological differences, Baxter and More were able to debate with Glanvill without rancour: More disagreed with Glanvill over the palpability of spirits, and Baxter disagreed with him over much larger issues of doctrine and conformism, but both were more inclined to conciliation than to controversy.²⁷⁾ Such tolerance between certain members of different factions was becoming more common in the early years of the Restoration than it had been during the Civil War and the

Protectorate: it was typical of the 'climates of opinions' of the time, especially among the Fellows of the Royal Society, where discussions of religion and politics were forbidden, and where members of differing persuasions came amicably together to discuss experimental philosophy, as they had done at Oxford and at Gresham College even during the years of the Protectorate. John Wilkins, who was a founder of the Royal Society, was especially notable as a conciliator: his marriage to Cromwell's sister, which protected Oxford against the Parliamentarians, did not prevent him from becoming a bishop under Charles II, and he was one of those whose influence on Glanvill is most striking.²⁸⁾

But it was with Henry More, who influenced and encouraged Glanvill at the start of his career, and after his death performed the friendly act of editing his scattered papers into the form of the *Saducismus Triumphatus*, that Glanvill had his closest friendship and working association. More was the leader of the group of Cambridge Platonists, sympathetic both to the discussion of the pre-existence of souls and to the enquiries of the Royal Society.²⁹⁾ He influenced Glanvill's work on pre-existence: Glanvill based the ideas in his *Lux Orientalis* (1662) on More's work on *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659): this book, with More's *Antidote against Atheisme* (1653) provided most of the philosophical ideas that Glanvill used in his witchcraft books.³⁰⁾

More corresponded with Glanvill over the matter of the Demon of Tedworth, and also collaborated in investigating another celebrated supernatural phenomenon, the case of Valentine Greatrakes, 'the Irish Stroker', a faith-healer whose story is told in his own *A Brief Account of Mr Valentine Greatrak's* (1666) and in Henry Stubbe's *The Miraculous Conformist*³¹⁾ (1666), and mentioned at the end of Glanvill's Essay VI 'Against Modern Sadducism in the matter of Witches and Apparitions'. Greatrakes, whose name is variously spelled, came to England invited by Viscount Conway on the recommendation of Henry More and George Rust, Dean of Connor, to cure the persistent headaches suffered by Lady

Anne Conway, More's pupil in philosophy. The case of Greatrakes, whose successes and failures were witnessed by many people, was a far more suitable subject than Mr Mompesson's drummer for the kind of research that More and Glanvill wished to conduct, and Glanvill made the most of the opportunity in his Essay. Doctrinally, the most notable factor in the case of Greatrakes was that, unlike most practitioners of magical healing (with the exception of the King himself), the healer was a member of the Established Church, a 'miraculous conformist' indeed. That the Church of England should have its miracle-workers was, for Glanvill and More, yet another defence of the strength of religion against materialism and unbelief: here was material evidence, in the form of an Irish squire who had no reason to defraud (he performed his cures for nothing, and accepted only his expenses from Lord Conway), which could stand up to the criticism of the scoffers, and provide an illustration to More's theory of 'a Sanative Contagion', or spiritual transmission of healing power.³²⁾

Evidence of More's connexions with the experimental scientists at Cambridge seems as slight as that of Glanvill's early links with the Invisible College at Oxford. When Wood mentioned Glanvill's wish that he had been at Cambridge to benefit from 'that new philosophy and art of philosophizing', it seems likely that he meant More's introduction of Cartesianism, rather than any experimental work being done, of which there was just as much, and of as high a quality, in progress at Oxford.³³⁾ Within the group of thinkers at Cambridge, Henry More, Isaac Barrow and Ralph Cudworth, Henry Power and Sir John Finch, with Glanvill as a correspondent and disciple, it was Cartesian philosophy that articulated their investigations and discussions: More's own Cartesianism, before he became disillusioned with Descartes, was one of the most important intellectual influences on Glanvill's work, and *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* is filled with references to the work of both thinkers.³⁴⁾

More's and Glanvill's investigations into the doctrines of spirits and

their manifestations were part of a small intellectual movement that went against the growing trend towards scepticism in these matters. Within this group, John Ray, Henry Power, and Glanvill working under More's influence, were concerned with avoiding the dualism implicit in Cartesianism.³⁵⁾ Other writers, John Aubrey, Meric Casaubon and Sir Thomas Browne, worked, like Glanvill, throughout the Restoration period to make the belief in spirits and witches intellectually respectable: Casaubon's book on the subject, *Of Credulity and Incredulity against the Sadducism of the Times in denying Spirits, Witches &c.* (1668) appeared in the same year as Glanvill's narrative of the Dæmon of Tedworth, and defends the truth of stories of demons and witches on the same grounds that Glanvill used: that such a belief was necessary to Christian faith. The writers they were attacking were Hobbes, Reginald Scot and other 'such course-grain'd philosophers' who refused to acknowledge that there might be 'other intelligent Beings besides those that are clad in heavy Earth or Clay'.³⁶⁾ Casaubon's ideas resemble those in More's *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656): he criticises Glanvill for taking his philosophical scepticism so far that he was in danger of falling into 'the sort of Atheism found in Hobbes'.³⁷⁾ Sir Robert Boyle was another man interested in Glanvill's work on witches and spirits: he argued the possibility of miraculous intervention by spirits in the affairs of the world in a tract against Spinoza.³⁸⁾

It has recently been suggested that the reason for the rejection of accusations of witchcraft was because 'they implied a conception of nature which now appeared inherently absurd', and that the attempts of the psychical researchers to find at least one instance of a supernatural occurrence that could be proven scientifically, failed because none could be tested under controlled conditions that would have satisfied the sceptics.³⁹⁾ But we also need to consider the difference between the way the evidence of witch-trials was extracted, using torture and sleeplessness, threats and suggestion, and the way in which the investigations into the

cases of John Mompesson and Valentine Greatrakes were conducted, where everyone involved, including the subjects, was concerned to find an explanation of the phenomena. The case of Casaubon is interesting too, for his curious methodology: he published an account in great detail of a celebrated case which occurred in the sixteenth century, *A True and Faithful Relation of What passed Between Dr. John Dee and some Spirits*, in a manner that was calculated to arouse popular curiosity, while describing Dee's experiences as '*Supposed Inspiration and imaginary Revelations*', and arguing, to the contrary effect, that 'the Publishing of it could not but be very Seasonable and Useful, as against *Atheists* at all times, so in these Times especially, when the Spirit of Error and Illusion...doth so much prevail.'⁴⁰⁾

Although it was a minority of thinkers that held a belief in spiritual phenomena, this minority was drawn from several of the prevailing 'climates of opinions' of the time: Ray and Power from the group of Cambridge natural philosophers most concerned with botany and classification, More from the less experimentally-minded Platonists who were opposed to the chemists who 'ly dead and buryed in a heap and rabble of slibber sauce experiments',⁴¹⁾ Boyle from the Oxford and London circles of experimenters, Baxter from the Puritan Nonconformists, and Casaubon and Sinclair from the literary scholars who collected and published relations to confirm the existence of spirits.⁴²⁾ It was also a minority that had a good backing from the booksellers, who had reissued Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* in 1665 with nine completely spurious chapters containing credulous stories of witchcraft, intended to undercut the generally sceptical intention of the old book, and with no indication that they were written by anyone other than Scot himself.⁴³⁾

Glanvill's first book on witchcraft, the *Philosophical Endeavour*, came out in the following year, and during the next two years ran to four editions. By this time Glanvill had abandoned most of his earlier enthusiastic Cartesianism, following More's disillusionment, had established

himself as a writer on pre-existence, the doctrine that the soul existed before birth, in which he followed More's interpretations of Origen and Plato. He had also rewritten *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* and published it under a new title, *Scepsis Scientifica*, with considerable alterations to the content and style.⁴⁴⁾ These alterations were another response to contemporary fashion and opinion, as style in scientific and theological writing became a matter of controversy during the first two decades of the Restoration. For Glanvill was a dandy in his style as in his dress: if he changed it and made it plainer, it was partly to follow the fashion of the day.⁴⁵⁾ Wood's chief praise for Glanvill is as a stylist, and it was his style that first attracted the attention of the Royal Society to him, not what he had to say, which was not strikingly original. Style was a great preoccupation of the Royal Society, and Thomas Sprat's celebrated remarks on its policy of adopting a plain style and its resolution 'to return back to the primitive Purity and Shortness, when Men deliver'd so many *Things*, almost in an equal Number of *Words*.',⁴⁶⁾ though it can only have expressed an ideal state of affairs, complement Boyle's advice that the 'Sceptical Chymist' should avoid the convoluted rhetoric he thought characteristic of the 'mere scholars' (those who hoped to find all truth in the works of Aristotle), and write instead more plainly and simply.⁴⁷⁾

Glanvill revised his work continually, either, as Wood cynically suggests, to get himself the reputation of being a book-a-year man, or for the more scholarly motive of a desire for greater accuracy and simplicity. At any rate, the changes he made were more often stylistic than substantial.

Basil Willey, the first modern literary critic to discuss Glanvill's work at any length, writes dismissively of Glanvill's later style in its pared-down form, quoting a passage from the *Essays* and saying that it is written in the voice of 'the Fellow of the Royal Society, the Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Charles II. and Rector of Bath Abbey, in other words, the voice of a man who had abandoned his originality to follow a party line.'⁴⁸⁾ The matter was by no means as simple as that: Glanvill's originality at

any period is questionable, he was continually influenced by the changing 'climates of opinions', and there are no clean breaks or steady gradations between one style and another in his work. Indeed, it can be argued that one reason for the brevity of the *Essays* in contrast to the loquacity of some of the earlier versions is the result of economical printing: several of them fit so neatly to a single signature that it makes one suspect that they were cropped to fit the sheet. Glanvill himself was disarmingly humble about his attainments: his prefaces, even within the conventions of the form, are models of modesty, he wrote repeatedly that his work was incomplete and unpolished, and he defines an Essay as 'an imperfect offer at a Subject'.⁴⁹

In the case of the essay 'Against Modern Sadducism in the matter of Witchcraft and Apparitions', Glanvill's reasons for producing the different versions were various: to improve the argument, to answer specific attacks, or merely to remain in the public eye. Glanvill pretended always to be consistent, making several prefatory remarks to successive editions to the effect that any objections to his proposition would be answered by a more careful reading of his text. Nevertheless, the original essay accumulated additions and appendices, until it appeared as the compendious and encyclopaedic *Saducismus Triumphatus*, replete with the stories and reports of his many collaborators which Glanvill had been collecting for the previous twenty years. But the essay itself was refined and pared down, not so drastically as the text of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, but sufficiently to improve on some of the arguments and remove some of the more picturesque phrases. Its finally revised form, (not used in the *Saducismus* as its editor, Henry More, could not find the manuscript, using the text of the 1668 edition instead,) appeared in the collected essays of 1676, stripped of its original typographical extravagances and with several pages of additional material. Glanvill's explanation for the small number of changes is a somewhat complacent one:

If I had thought it worth the while, I might have been more exact in new modelling, and

could perhaps have given them [i.e. the essays] a turn that would have been more agreeable to some phancies, but my Laziness, or my Judgment made me think there was no need of that trouble.⁵⁰⁾

The philosophical arguments of the original version won Glanvill few admirers: what carried conviction to the general reader later on in the century, when popular belief in witchcraft was increasing again, fuelled by reports of malevolent activity from New England, was the collection of stories and their vivid narration.

Glanvill, as we have seen, was supported in his beliefs by people from all of the major intellectual groups of the time with the exception of Hobbes's supporters and the Anabaptists. The weight of intellect that had been behind the sceptical writers before the Restoration, and going back into the previous century, with Reginald Scot, Samuel Harsnett, Thomas Ady, who published *A Candle in the Dark* in 1655 and *A Perfect Discovery of Witches* in 1661, and Sir Robert Filmer, all notable, if not for brilliance, for good forensic common-sense, shifted to the side of the believers, with Henry More, Glanvill, Baxter and Boyle arguing, not from common-sense, but from what they regarded as scientifically probable evidence, and a sound basis for a philosophical exposition. In fact it is arguable whether there was more than one first-rate intellect expounding the sceptics' cause; namely, the great Malmesburian philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in 'Of the Kingdome of Darknesse', the fourth part of *Leviathan*.⁵¹⁾ It is paradoxical that Glanvill and Boyle each used the idea of scepticism as an example of the enquiring, investigating habit of mind that the Royal Society promoted, yet treated the matter of witches and spirits with such a lack of scepticism. Boyle wrote *The Sceptical Chymist* in 1661, the same year that Glanvill started his investigations into the Drummer of Tedworth. A sceptical chemist was supposed to be one who did not take information from authorities for granted, but tested it experimentally. Glanvill himself gave the subtitle 'confest Ignorance the way to Science' to his *Scepsis Scientifica*, 'science' here being the antonym to 'ignorance',

rather than referring to a more specific body of knowledge. Though not so fundamentally Cartesian in its demand for a return to first principles as *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, the *Scepsis* was an equally stern attack on those who trusted to 'Confident Opinion' in matters of natural philosophy.⁵²⁾ On the other hand, Glanvill used the terms 'Sadducee', 'Infidel' and 'sceptic' to refer to those 'looser gentry and the small pretenders to philosophy and wit' who are 'generally deriders of the belief in witches'.⁵³⁾ Scepticism about received authority, especially the whole mountain of scholasticism piled around the work of Aristotle, was a good thing, while scepticism towards eyewitness reports, especially if they led to a demonstration of the existence of spirits, and from there to a proof of God's providence that would bring men back to faith, was damnable unbelief and nothing more than an invitation to atheism. It is not surprising that Glanvill could be accused both of arrogance and gullibility: his intellectual inclination to question received opinion was unfortunately beaten by his wish to believe in what he thought to be the evidence of his senses. He went to Mompesson's house supposing it to be haunted, and, like many visitors to such places (including the Hobbists whom he mentioned in his letter to Baxter), he saw and heard what he wanted to see and hear, and did not question too deeply whether or not he could have been hoaxed.

Glanvill was not alone in making this particular error of judgment: Aubrey, Casaubon, Sir Thomas Browne and Henry More were happy to accept eye-witness accounts as the most reliable form of information after direct personal experience. The paradox in Glanvill's case came from his position halfway between the mystical Platonists at Cambridge and the Oxford group of Latitudinarian natural philosophers. The byways into which the Cambridge Platonists sometimes strayed have been described as 'scholastic metaphysics...led astray precisely by the same sort of cabalistical erudition which proved so unhealthily attractive elsewhere at Cambridge', and Henry More's hypothetical speculations about witches and angels as the work of 'a metaphysician gone

berserker'.⁵⁴⁾ This is certainly overstating the case, but it is true that More's use of tales in the *Antidote against Atheism* is less scientific in its intention than was Glanvill's personal investigation, however misleading, into a contemporary instance of haunting and manifestation by spirits.⁵⁵⁾

Glanvill sat on the fence between two groups that were to a certain extent in opposition to one another: the Latitudinarians, with their interest in the natural world and their search for a way to present religion to their contemporaries as a series of beliefs that a rational man could observe to be true, altered the Platonist idea of reason as a phenomenon of the spirit, which existed before birth, would exist after death and was in communion with other spirits, into a more objective rationalism.⁵⁶⁾ His work shows this division of loyalties, and nowhere more clearly than in the Essay 'Against Modern Sadducism', where an exposition of Platonist and Origenian beliefs in spirits and witchcraft is presented, by a Fellow of the Royal Society, as a 'Philosophical Investigation' to be judged as a rational argument.

Notes

- 1) Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, (London, 1934) p. 204. The whole of chapter IX (pp. 170–204) deals with Glanvill.
- 2) Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, (London, 1661) p. 227.
- 3) In this article, references are given thus: G 5/17 indicates page five, line seventeen of the original text, referred to in the notes as the Essay.
- 4) OED cites Henry More's *Philosophical Poems*, (1647), and quotes from his *Ψυχωδία Platonica; or a Platonic Song of the Soul* (1642).
- 5) More's books on the soul, spirits and witchcraft include *An Antidote against Atheisme* (1653), *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656), and *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659). Glanvill borrowed heavily from all three in writing the Essay.
- 6) Essay, G 1–2.
- 7) Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, new edition, with additions, edited by Philip Bliss (London, 1817), III. 1244–53, pp. 1244–45.
- 8) Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, III, p. 1245.
- 9) *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB) article on Joseph Glanvill by Sir Leslie Stephen.
- 10) Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, p. 170.
- 11) DNB; Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, III, p. 1246.

- 12) Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing: The Three Versions* (facsimile of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing, Sceptis Scientifica* and the Essay 'Against Confidence in Philosophy') with introduction and notes by Stephen Medcalf, (Hove, 1970), introduction p. xvi.
- 13) Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, III, p. 1244; Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626–1660*, (London, 1975) p. 166; Jackson I. Cope, *Joseph Glanvill, Anglican Apologist*, (St. Louis, 1956) [now referred to hereafter as Cope] p. 3; Cope, pp. 15–17.
- 14) Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, III, p. 1244.
- 15) Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England*, (Cambridge, 1981) pp. 78–83, discusses these virtuosi.
- 16) *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, edited and translated by A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall (Madison, Milwaukee and London, 1965–) III, 502, letter no. 671; *ibid.* vol. IV, p. 249, letter no. 813; *ibid.* vol. IV, p. 275, letter no. 821.
- 17) *Ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 42–3, letter no. 957.
- 18) Essay, G 1/1–22.
- 19) Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism in Some Philosophical Considerations about Witchcraft*, (London, 1668), 'Palpable Evidence of Spirits and Witchcraft: In an Account of the Fam'd Disturbance by the Drummer, In the House of M. Mompesson', occupying pages 113–158 in the 4th edition, 1668, and henceforward referred to by the running title, 'The Daemon of Tedworth'. See chapter
- 20) For Robert Boyle see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, (London, 1971) pp. 577–8 and p. 580; for the Ragley Circle see Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common-Sense*, (London, 1894) pp. 84–126.
- 21) *The Manuscripts of J. Eliot Hodgkin*, edited by J.C. Jeaffreson, Hist. MSS. Commission [39], report 15, appendix 2. (London, 1897) p. 52.
- 22) 'The Daemon of Tedworth', p. 122.
- 23) *ibid.* pp. 136–7.
- 24) Cope gives a catalogue, p. 8 note 29, of the Baxter-Glanvill correspondence in Dr. Williams's Library: I quote this letter by kind permission of the Librarian.
- 25) See *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes, (London, 1964) IV, p. 41, letter 27, dated 1 March [1668–9].
- 26) See above, pp. 3–4.
- 27) Cope, p. 7.
- 28) See Cope, p. 3 and other references to Wilkins.
- 29) Webster, *The Great Instauration*, p. 149; for the editions of *Saducismus Triumphatus*, see Wing STC, G822–G826A.
- 30) See Cope, pp. 87–103, 'Glanvill, More and a World of Spirits in an Age of Reason'; Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, (London, 1659); Georges Edelen, 'Joseph Glanvill, Henry More, and the Phantom Drummer of Tedworth', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, X (1956), 186–192.
- 31) See DNB article on Valentine Greatrakes; Valentine Greatrakes, *A Brief Account*

- of Mr. Valentine Greatrak's and divers of the strange cures by him lately performed. Written by himself in a letter addressed to the Honble Robert Boyle, seq. &c. (London, 1666); Henry Stubbe, *The Miraculous Conformist*, (London, 1666); *Conway Letters*, edited by Marjorie Hope Nicholson, (London, 1930).
- 32) Essay, pp. 55–57; Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, (London, 1656), scholia on section 58.
 - 33) See Webster, *The Great Instauration*, pp. 145, 150, 153.
 - 34) Ibid. p. 149.
 - 35) Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England*, (Cambridge, 1981), p. 182.
 - 36) 'Dr. More's Letter to Mr. Glanvill', *Saducismus Triumphatus* (London, 1681) First edition, I, p. 16. See chapter
 - 37) See Cope, pp. 30, 73.
 - 38) See Hunter, op. cit. p. 182.
 - 39) Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 577–8.
 - 40) Meric Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation of What passed for many Yeers Between Dr. John Dee...and Some Spirits*, (London, 1659), preface, p.[i], sig. [A.1.recto]
 - 41) Quoted from Webster, *The Great Instauration*, p. 147.
 - 42) George Sinclair published *Satans Invisible World Discovered; or, a Choice Collection of Modern Relations, proving... that there are Devils, Spirits, Witches and Apparitions*. (London, 1685).
 - 43) Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, (London, 1665): the spurious chapters are pp. 215–228.
 - 44) Joseph Glanvill, *Scepsis Scientifica*, (London, 1665); see Cope pp. 15–17, 38, and 121–26 for the relationship between these works; see also the facsimile edition and introduction mentioned in note 13. above.
 - 45) Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, p. 1245.
 - 46) Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*, (London, 1667), p. 133.
 - 47) Robert Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist* (London, 1661) p. 7.
 - 48) Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background*, pp. 172–3.
 - 49) *Scepsis Scientifica*, 'An Address to the Royal Society', sig. c. 3. verso.
 - 50) *Essays on Several Important Subjects*, preface sig. a3a.
 - 51) Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1651) Part IV 'Of the Kingdome of Darknesse', pp. 333–387.
 - 52) See above, note 48; *Scepsis Scientifica*, title page, sig. A.2.recto.
 - 53) *Saducismus Triumphatus*, (London, 1681), preface (dated 1668) sig. F.3.
 - 54) W.T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth Century Cambridge*, (Harvard, 1958) pp. 78–79.
 - 55) See Henry More, *An Antidote against Atheism*, book III.
 - 56) H.R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, (London, 1965) p. 156.